

THEIR HISTORY AND CULTURE

other form of parallelism must be observed, by which parts of speech—adjectives, verbs, and nouns—must be matched by the same parts of speech in the next line. Moreover, a given character must not be used twice in the same poem. Obviously such forms are much less elastic than those of most other peoples. A genius is able to express himself through them with beauty, but for the majority who have conformed to them—as have a large proportion of Chinese scholars—they are apt to lead to somewhat mechanical results.

Fiction has been mentioned more than once in preceding chapters and, accordingly, requires here no elaborate statement. Since stories were usually written in the vernacular, the Chinese scholar, with his exclusive esteem for the classical style, formerly did not regard them worthy of admission to the ranks of literature. Of late years, however, with the use of the vernacular for all literary purposes, an increasing interest has developed in fiction and its history, especially since in some of it are to be found examples, rare elsewhere, of the colloquial of past centuries. At least as early as the Sung stories were being composed in the language of every day. Under the Mongols what are usually called novels were written in large quantities, and the output continued under the Ming and the Ch'ing. Some fiction is made up of short stories. Much of it, however, is in long narratives. Part of it is in the form of historical romances, of which the *San Kuo Chih*, or the "History of the Three Kingdoms" is probably the most famous. The *San Kuo Chih* arose out of tales which must have been related for centuries, somewhat like the Arthurian legends, before they were put in their present standard literary dress. Historical

romances have been made the basis of many plays and from them has been drawn much of the repertoire of the strolling story-tellers. Several of the novels, among them the *Hung Lou Meng*, are of high literary quality, with excellent delineation of character and with intimate and informing pictures of Chinese life and customs. Fiction has sometimes been made the vehicle for portraying Utopias and advocating reform. It also contains much of the supernatural, with a good deal about the actions of spirits. The love which is exalted is usually extramarital and sex is often badly dealt with. Some stories belong as much to pornography as to fiction, but that criticism cannot be leveled against most of the best